



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL RETARDATION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

JAMES S. REINHARD, M.D.
COMMISSIONER

Post Office Box 1797
Richmond, Virginia 23218-1797

Telephone (804) 786-3921
Voice/TDD (804) 371-8977
www.dmhmrzas.state.va.us

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Contact: Stacey Atwell (804-786-1332) satwell@dmhmrsas.state.va.us
Sarah Scott Thomas (804-739-8501) sssthenas1@aol.com

Virginia Budget Includes Funding for Supports and Services for Infants and Toddlers

(Richmond, VA –June 1, 2004) At the close of May, the month Virginia Governor Mark Warner proclaimed as *Early Intervention Month*, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services announced the availability of an additional \$750,000 dollars for the provision of services for Virginia's most fragile citizens through the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia. These funds were part of the budget adopted by the 2004 Special Session of the General Assembly and will become available July 1, 2004.

The Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia is the early intervention service that identifies and connects infants and toddlers (0 – 3 years old) with developmental delays and disabilities to the services they need. Children with disabilities and developmental delays often need extra help in areas such as sitting, crawling, walking or talking. More than 8,050 infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities received support services in 2003 in Virginia.

The increase in early intervention funds are due in part to families who advocated on behalf of infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities who could not speak for themselves. Lawmakers were able to recognize the importance of the services and support provided through early intervention for both the families of the young children and the Commonwealth.

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In a story released earlier, Shirley Ricks, Director of Child and Family Services for the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the lead agency for Part C early intervention, reported that the provision of early intervention services to infants and toddlers is beneficial to all Virginians. Studies show that every dollar invested in early childhood development programs saves seven dollars in remedial education, welfare and incarceration costs. The additional funding will be used to meet caseloads that are growing at an average rate of eight percent annually and maintain services such as occupational, physical and speech therapy, parent education and other necessary supports for infants and toddlers who have developmental delays and disabilities. These funds will be distributed to the 40 councils throughout Virginia who provide services to infants and toddlers and their families. In many cases, one or more special services such as speech or physical therapy are provided to infants and toddlers in need such as:

Megan Christine Grant, a blue-eyed 2-year-old from Accomack County in Virginia's Eastern Shore has received speech, physical and occupational therapy through early intervention since her premature birth in 2001. Megan was diagnosed with Cerebral palsy and Kim Grant, Megan's mother, believes that without the early intervention staff Megan would not have progressed. Megan receives therapy several times per week through early intervention.

Medical costs for children such as Megan can be daunting for a family who is faced with a lifetime of need for special medical care. The Infant and Toddler Connection of Virginia, provides services regardless of the family's ability to pay for them. Many Virginia families cannot afford the services that their child needs, therefore the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia helps families identify resources such as insurance, private donations, or Medicaid or provides services on a sliding scale (in many cases at no cost at all to the family) to make sure that each child in need receives the support that will help him to grow and prosper to his greatest potential.

Steven Maralit, a happy 4-year-old from the town of Wise in Virginia's Appalachian Plateau, laughs a lot and makes those around him – particularly his family - laugh with his funny facial expressions. He has a condition known as Down syndrome. His parents learned about early intervention services before their son was born. The early intervention staff guided the Maralits to information about Down syndrome and within two months of his birth, were providing services to Steven. The Infant & Toddler Connection is a valuable resource for families, connecting them to services, support groups, information and community programs.

“Without early intervention, it would be hard for a parent to know what things to work on with their child,” said Maralit. “(Early Intervention) gave me guidance on what direction to take when it comes to developing Steven’s skills and maximizing his potential. They also provided respite money for the family,” she said.

It is estimated that 10,000 infants and toddlers in Virginia are eligible for early intervention services but almost 20% of the children eligible are still not receiving the services they need. Early intervention is part of Governor Warner’s Action Plan *to Improve Access for Children* and the additional funds in Virginia’s budget are a clear indication of both his support and that of the General Assembly.

Many of Virginia’s children prosper because of the support of early intervention. Children like “Augie” Webster in Falls Church who was born with Cerebral palsy and whose condition made it difficult for him to do many of the things, other children his age could do. It was the early intervention staff who introduced the Websters to the special equipment that could be used to help Augie by working with the Websters’ insurance company to pay for a special walker and a corner chair that provides support to help Augie strengthen his legs.

“I didn’t know about all the technology that was available to help my child,” said Kathy Webster, Augie’s mother. “The early intervention staff knew what was out there. They could see what Augie needed and they found a way for us to try it, see what worked, and then found a vendor that was on our insurance policy to purchase the equipment,” she said. Through the special technology available, the family was able to help Augie do things that other children were doing and to increase his abilities and progress.

Early intervention is a valuable service to all Virginians and it works! The Infant & Toddler Connection, Virginia’s early intervention program is included as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is available to all qualified children from birth until three years of age who demonstrate a developmental delay or disability. This may be a need for a little extra help with sitting, crawling, walking or talking, or a need resulting from a medical disability. Services are provided, in many cases, in the home or other convenient location for the family and are provided regardless of the families’ ability to pay for them. For more information about the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia, and to connect to services in Virginia, call 1-800-234-1448 or visit the web site at www.infantva.org. The Sooner. The Better.

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